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16. — *A Discourse delivered before the Georgia Historical Society, Savannah, on Friday, February 12th, 1841.* By WILLIAM BACON STEVENS. Boston: Freeman & Bolles. 8vo. pp. 40.

THE Georgia Historical Society was founded about three years ago, and incorporated by an act of the legislature of the State. Since that time it has been in active operation. A volume of its "Collections" has been published, containing a series of valuable papers, among which is a reprint of four rare tracts, relating to the first settlement and early history of Georgia.

Dr. Stevens's "Discourse" was delivered before this Society, and, in selecting a subject, he has chosen the period in the history of Georgia between the passing of the celebrated Stamp Act and the Declaration of Independence. This ground is almost wholly untrodden by former writers; but the facts here brought to light by Dr. Stevens show, that the transactions in Georgia during that time claim an important place among the events of the Revolution. If the spirit, which animated the other colonies, was less awake and less prompt in Georgia during the first stages of the contest, there were good reasons for it, reasons in no degree impeaching the patriotism and sound principles of the people; and, as soon as the Georgians felt their rights to be in danger, they took their stand boldly, and maintained it resolutely, to the last, with a zeal and perseverance that never flagged.

On the 1st of November, 1765, when the Stamp Act was to go into effect, the stamped papers had not arrived in Georgia, but they were daily expected, and the "Liberty Boys" had entered into a combination, as in the other colonies, to prevent their distribution, and to compel the distributing officer to resign. At length, however, the stamps arrived, in his Majesty's ship of war *Speedwell*, and were deposited for safe keeping in Fort Halifax. This disposition of them did not satisfy the "Liberty Boys." They held secret meetings, and laid a plan for breaking open the Fort and destroying the papers. News came, on the 2d of January, 1766, that nearly two hundred had assembled for this purpose.

"The Governor, arming himself, immediately ordered the two companies of Rangers, numbering fifty-four men, to attend him, marched with them to the Fort, took out the stamps, placed them in a cart, and, escorted by the military, conveyed them to his mansion. The people looked on in sullen silence, but it was a silence that gave the Governor so much alarm, that for many days he kept a guard of forty men over

his house, and for four nights was in such anxiety and fear that he never removed his clothes. The next day, about 1 o'clock, the Governor, by preconcerted signals, was made acquainted with the arrival of Mr. Agnus, the stamp distributor, at Tybee, and fearing the rage of the citizens, immediately despatched an armed scout-boat, with two or three friends of the government, who, with much secrecy, and a charge to allow him to speak to no one, brought him to the city on the 4th, where he was received by the Governor at his house, and that afternoon took the required oaths. But a few days' residence at the Governor's, even with a guard mounted night and day, convinced him of his insecurity, and in a fortnight he left the city.

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"Towards the close of January, a body of six hundred men assembled within a few miles of the city, and intimated to the Governor, that unless the papers were removed from the place, they would march thither, raze his dwelling to the ground, attack the Fort, and destroy the stamps. The Governor immediately sent the papers down to Fort George, at Cockspur, and placed them in charge of a Captain, two subalterns, and fifty privates of the Rangers. But even this was not deemed a sufficient security, and on the 3d of February, they were once more removed, and finally deposited on board the man-of-war which had brought them to the colony."—pp. 12, 13.

The events of several succeeding years, the struggles between the Governor and the people, the one strenuous for his prerogative in favor of the royal cause, and the other for their rights, are well described by Dr. Stevens. He draws the following sketch of the state of things in Georgia at the beginning of the war, after having mentioned the resolute spirit shown by the Parish of St. John in sending a deputy to the Congress, which convened in May, 1775.

"The hesitation on the part of the other parishes in Georgia to adopt all the measures of Congress, was the theme of violent and unjustifiable denunciation. A momentary glance at the condition of Georgia, will remove these unfounded aspersions. According to the returns of Governor Wright to the Lords of Trade, the population of Georgia in 1774, was but seventeen thousand whites, and fifteen thousand blacks; and the entire militia, between the ages of sixteen and sixty, numbered only two thousand eight hundred and twenty-eight, scattered from Augusta to St Mary's. Within her borders, and along her frontier, were the Creeks, with four thousand gun-men, the Chickasaws with four hundred and fifty gun-men, the Cherokees with three thousand gun-men, and the Choctaws with two thousand five hundred gun-men, comprising all together, over forty thousand Indians, ten thousand of whom were warriors, and all, by means of presents and the influence of Captain Stuart and Mr. Cameron, were firm in their alliance with the royal party, and could be brought in any numbers against the colony. On the south, lay the garrisoned province of Florida with a large military force under Governor Tonyn, and hordes of Tory handits waiting for the signal of the spoiler. On the east was a long line of seaboard, with many fine harbours, sheltered

bays, large rivers, well-stocked islands, and every thing inviting for a naval depredation. And the Earl of Dartmouth had directed General Gage and Admiral Graves, to furnish Governor Wright with any force, military and naval, which he might require. Besides these motives, which addressed themselves to the fears of the colonists, there were others, which partook of a moral character. Since its settlement, Georgia had received, by grant of Parliament, nearly a million of dollars, in addition to the bounties which had been lavished on the silk culture, indigo, and other agricultural products. This consideration weighed with much force on many minds, and on such the Governor took every occasion to impress the baseness of ingratitude towards a sovereign whose paternal care had been so largely exerted in their behalf. Each of the other colonies also had a charter upon which to base some right, or claim of redress, but Georgia had none. When the trustees' patent expired in 1752, all her chartered privileges became extinct. On its erection into a royal province, the commission of the Governor was her only constitution, she had no fixed and fundamental basis, but lived upon the will of the monarch, the mere creature of his volition. At the head of the government was Sir James Wright, Bart., who, for fourteen years, had presided over it with singular ability and acceptance. When he arrived, in 1760, the colony was languishing under the accumulated mismanagement of the former trustees and more recent Governors. But his zeal and efforts soon changed its aspect to health and vigor. He guided it into the avenues of wealth, he sought out the means of its advancement; his prudence secured the amity of the Indians; and his negotiations added millions of acres to its territory. Diligent in his office, firm in his resolves, loyal in his opinions, courteous in his manners, and possessed of a vigorous and well-balanced mind, he ruled the province more by suasion and argument than by menace and force. Instead of being, like many of the royal Governnors, obnoxious, he was beloved by his people; and, though he differed from the majority of them as to the cause of their distresses, and the means for their removal, he never allowed himself to be betrayed into one act of violence, or into any course of outrage and revenge. The few years of his administration were the only happy ones Georgia ever enjoyed until after the Revolution; and to his energy and devotedness, mainly, is to be attributed her civil and commercial prosperity. With these obstacles within and around her, is it to be wondered that Georgia hesitated and wavered? that she feared to assume a responsibility which threatened inevitably to crush her? Her little phalanx of patriots, but little outnumbering the band of Leonidas, were men of Spartan hearts; but Spartan hearts, even at Thermopylæ, could not resist the hosts of the Persians; and what had they to hope, in her feeble state, her inhabitants rent with discord, her metropolis filled with placemen and officers, her seaboard guarded by a fleet, and her frontier for two hundred and fifty miles, gleaming with the tomahawk of the scalper, and the fires of the warrior's wigwam? If there ever was a time for Georgia to falter, it was then; and falter she did,—but only for a moment; for, soon summoning her energies, she cast aside all fear, and, commending her cause to the God of battles, joined in the sacred league of Independence.” — pp. 28–30.

Governor Wright having obtained permission to return to England, he went on board the *Scarborough*, an armed vessel, on the 11th of February, 1776. There were then several public vessels in the river, which wanted supplies. The Governor wrote to the Council requesting them to furnish fresh supplies to the fleet. They refused, and preparations were immediately made for extorting by force what could not be obtained by negotiation. Three armed vessels, and two transports with soldiers, passed up the river for that purpose.

“Having previously sounded Back river, two of the vessels on the 2d of March sailed up that channel. One anchored directly opposite the town, and the other grounded at the west end of Hutchinson's Island in attempting to pass round it and come down upon the shipping from above. During the night, the troops from the first vessel under Majors Maitland and Grant, were silently marched across Hutchinson's Island, and embarked in merchant vessels which lay on the other side. When the morning of the 3d of March, 1776, revealed the proximity of the naval and military force, the inhabitants were filled with the utmost indignation. The grounded vessel was immediately attacked by a company of riflemen under Major John Habersham, who soon drove every man from its deck, and would have made it his prize, but, having no boats to effect it, he had the mortification of seeing her float off at high water and escape. In the mean time General McIntosh had collected a few troops, and despatched a flag of truce with several officers, to demand why the soldiers had been brought up to town, and placed in merchantmen in the river? The flag was detained; another, sent to learn the cause of the detention, was denied admittance; and, firing upon the soldiers who had insolently ordered it off, received in return a volley, which wounded one man, and so shattered the boat that it with difficulty reached the shore. Having no artillery of sufficient calibre to dislodge them, an order was given to set the vessels on fire. In the afternoon a few adventurers, among whom was General James Jackson, — he, who was in the first and the last battle in Georgia, proceeded to the ship *Inverness*, loaded with rice, deer skins, &c., which they set on fire, and slipping her cable, she drifted with the tide upon the brig *Nelly*, which was soon wrapped in flames. The officers and soldiers precipitately abandoned her, and, in their confusion, threw themselves in the half-drained and uliginous rice fields, whence they were extricated the next morning with the loss of their arms and ammunition. Two other vessels were also consumed, and the invaders totally routed, not however without the sacrifice of several valuable lives.” — pp. 34, 35.

The above extracts will show the nature of the particulars contained in Dr. Stevens's *Discourse*. There are many other facts not less interesting or important, and they carry with them the greater weight as being drawn from the most authentic sources.